

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 16, 2015

The Honorable Sylvia Burwell
Secretary
United States Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Burwell:

As you know, communities throughout the United States are grappling with a devastating opioid abuse epidemic, which has had tragic consequences for many families nationwide. Every day, 44 people in the U.S. die from an overdose of prescription painkillers and even more become addicted. In addition, heroin overdose deaths have increased significantly, while research suggests that many new users first took prescription opioids for non-medical reasons before turning to heroin. These trends are alarming, and we must do more at the federal, state, and local levels to confront America's opioid addiction.

In light of this ongoing epidemic, we introduced the *Heroin and Prescription Opioid Abuse Prevention, Education, and Enforcement Act* during the 113th Congress and have reintroduced this legislation again this year. Our bill takes a multi-pronged approach to fight opioid abuse, including by calling for the development of best practices for opioid prescribing. It would bring together a diverse group of stakeholders, including prescribers and experts with perspectives from the patient and addiction treatment communities, to issue new prescribing recommendations based on existing best practices and the latest in pain management and addiction research. Additionally, our bill would ensure that prescribers and patients have the opportunity to review and provide feedback on these guidelines prior to publication. Finally, our bill calls for the development of a strategy to ensure that the best practices will be disseminated throughout the prescriber community.

We were pleased to see that you have included fighting opioid abuse among your priorities as Secretary, and were especially encouraged to see that under your direction, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has conducted a thorough review of existing clinical practice guidelines for prescribing opioids to treat chronic pain. We are also pleased that the CDC appears to be taking a similar approach to the plan we outlined in our legislation, and is currently bringing together a diverse group of experts to develop new guidelines that will better enable medical professionals to treat chronic, non-cancer pain patients while reducing the risk of opioid abuse. As the CDC works through the process of developing and updating these guidelines, we hope that the agency will continue to seek robust input from a broad range of relevant stakeholders, including agency experts, practitioners, professional associations, and patient advocates, and engage in meaningful dialogue with the prescriber community prior to producing a final product. It is critically important that the new guidelines take into account the

perspective of prescribers as well as the concerns of patients and experts with experience treating addiction and chronic pain.

It is encouraging that the CDC is moving to develop the new guidelines, and we would like to be kept informed of the progress being made on this initiative. To help facilitate our understanding of your plans, we respectfully request your response to the following questions by August 14, 2015:

- When is each phase of the current guidelines development process scheduled to take place, and when will each phase be completed?
- Once the CDC has completed its work with experts and stakeholder groups to craft a proposed set of guidelines, what are your plans to ensure that a broad range of practitioners are able to comment on the guidelines?
- How does the CDC plan to work with other agencies and non-governmental entities to 1) increase awareness of the final guidelines among practitioners, and 2) encourage adoption of the guidelines?

Thank you for your work on this critically important issue. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Joe Donnelly
United States Senator



Kelly Ayotte
United States Senator